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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the U. S. Department of Defense has

trimmed about half a million civilian and uniformed employees (Ricks, 1994). As military bases continue to close over the next few years, thousands more service personnel will be released from active duty. The majority of these workers will not be eligible for full retirement, and will need to pursue second careers in the private sector. As companies also restructure and downsize, former defense personnel may find limited opportunities among corporate employers. Instead, displaced service personnel may discover a demand for their technical skills and supervisory experience from a different source: elementary and secondary schools seeking qualified teachers, teachers' aides, and other support staff. The Department of Defense is sponsoring a program called "Troops to Teachers" to help workers affected by defense cutbacks pursue new careers as teachers and teachers' aides. The program extends financial assistance to military personnel so they can obtain required teaching credentials, and also provides partial salary subsidies to enable qualified school districts to subsequently hire these individuals.

During 1994, the Troops to Teachers program will offer stipends up to \$5,000 to allow approximately 2,500 recipients to enroll in teacher education or alternative certification programs nationwide (Taylor, 1994). This digest describes the details of the Troops to Teachers program and discusses the conversion of military personnel to school employees.

TRANSITION TO TEACHING

While some teachers in the classroom have had previous military experience, the current drawdown of armed forces is focusing attention on teaching as a second career. Several reasons explain why teaching has become a more attractive option to servicemen and women being forced out of their military occupations.

*Many defense personnel are well educated in fields like mathematics, science, and foreign languages that often experience shortages of qualified classroom teachers. In addition, former service personnel have managerial and organizational skills to oversee classrooms and maintain discipline (Celis, 1992).

*A substantial proportion of military personnel is from minority groups that are underrepresented in the teaching profession. Schools are interested in hiring such candidates to diversify their teaching staffs and give role models to students, particularly those who are of color or disadvantaged (Ryan, 1994).

*Education reform efforts in recent years have heightened the prestige of the teaching profession, by expanding teacher authority, promoting professionalism, and increasing compensation (Nyjordet, 1991).

*In training new recruits for combat, service personnel already have experience instructing and mentoring young people. Some veterans may view teaching as a way to continue serving their country, by building the skills and self-esteem of children affected

by violence, poverty, and illiteracy (Nyjordet, 1991; Ryan, 1994).

*By comparison, teaching may offer former military personnel more job security than other prospects in the private sector. Companies that once hired many veterans--such as defense contractors and airlines--are streamlining their operations and eliminating production of defense materiel. The sheer number and frequency of defense personnel cuts--estimated at 11,000 per month (Ricks, 1994)--may overwhelm local job markets, particularly those depressed by closing military bases and stagnating local economies.

Though military personnel are highly trained, many of them are ineligible to teach in public schools because they lack appropriate certification and preparation as classroom instructors. The Troops to Teachers program aims to help former military personnel bridge this gap, by assisting them in becoming certified and employed as teachers and teachers' aides.

The Department of Defense has long supported educational opportunities for service personnel; in 1987 it issued a directive (Number 1322.8) that facilitates operation of voluntary education programs by each branch of the armed forces, assisting all service members to attain their personal educational, career, and vocational goals (Anderson, 1991). The 1987 directive also described the function of the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES) to support programs offered through various educational institutions. DANTES (based in Pensacola, Florida) is the managing agency for Troops to Teachers.

TROOPS TO TEACHERS

The Troops to Teachers program was created by Congress in 1992, through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 (Public Law 102-484). Title XLIV, Subtitle D of this law authorizes the Secretary of Defense to assist eligible members of the armed forces after their separation from active duty to obtain (A) certification or licensure as elementary or secondary school teachers or (B) the credentials necessary to serve as teachers' aides; and...facilitate the employment of such members by local educational agencies...experiencing a shortage of teachers or teachers' aides. (U.S. Congress, 1992) To obtain these credentials as quickly as possible, Troops to Teachers steers participants to alternative certification programs, particularly those that award credit for military service or education. Servicemen and women with at least six years of continuous active duty, and displaced civilian employees from the Departments of Defense and Energy, may apply for a \$5,000 stipend for the costs of teacher licensure or teacher's aide preparation. Recipients seeking teacher certification must have a bachelor's degree or higher when they apply for the stipend, while those interested in teacher's aide courses must hold at least an associate's degree (Taylor, 1994). Nondegreed service personnel who earn baccalaureates within 5 years after their discharge may qualify for future Troops to Teachers stipends (U.S. Congress, 1993).

All participants in Troops to Teachers must agree to acquire necessary credentials within 2 years of their separation from the military, and then accept full-time employment for 5 consecutive years in schools that receive federal Chapter 1 grants for compensatory education programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Recipients of Troops to Teachers stipends who do not obtain required credentials within 2 years of their separation, or who do not work 5 years in eligible schools, may be required to reimburse funds to the Department of Defense.

To encourage schools to hire Troops to Teachers participants, the Department of Defense will provide incentive grants to local education agencies that (A) are receiving grants under chapter 1 of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965...and (B) are also experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers, in particular a shortage of science, mathematics, or engineering teachers...and a shortage of teachers' aides. (U.S. Congress, 1992)

Placement grants fund part of the salary that former service personnel earn as teachers and aides over their 5-year employment terms, according to the following breakdown (U.S. Congress, 1993):



Year of Employment, Salary Proportion, Maximum Amount:



1st year, 50 percent, \$25,000



2nd year, 40 percent, \$10,000



3rd year, 30 percent, \$ 7,500



4th year, 20 percent, \$ 5,000



5th year, 10 percent, \$ 2,500

Should a teacher or aide leave a district before his/her 5-year term is completed, the

Department of Defense may require the school to pay back part of the incentive grant. Moreover, grants will not be issued to schools that terminate or displace other employees to create vacancies for Troops to Teachers participants. In 1994, the program plans to award 1,200 grants to place teachers and teacher aides in qualified schools (Taylor, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The Troops to Teachers program was appropriated \$65 million in FY 1993 to issue stipends and grants for 2 years (Taylor, 1994). The program is authorized to operate until October 1, 1997, though appropriations for fiscal years 1995-1997 are uncertain. If funding for Troops to Teachers is continued, the program will undoubtedly accelerate the presence of former defense personnel in the nation's classrooms. Yet the potential impact of the program is difficult to predict. Currently, there is no national database that tracks the number of teachers who once served in the military (Celis, 1992), and only limited anecdotal evidence that their transition from the armed forces to the teaching force has been successful. Perhaps the best evaluation of the conversion of troops into teachers lies in the comment of a former Navy captain, as he summarized his first year as a 6th-grade teacher: "I enjoy teaching, but I was not prepared for how tough it is" (Celis, 1992).

RESOURCES

References identified with an ED number (documents) have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC. References with an SP number are being processed for inclusion in the ERIC database.

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